

A 'Zine about Music, Culture, and David Morris.

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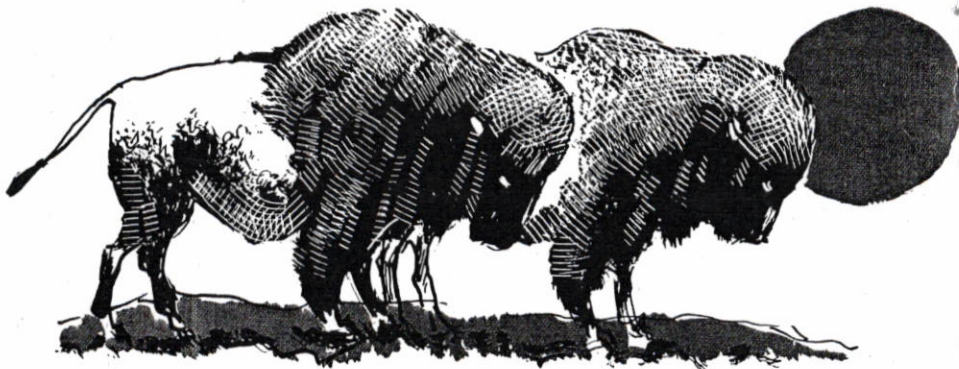
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Sleep Not Work



MC Paul Barman
Kansas City, Missouri
Peter Brotzmann
Weird Fiction

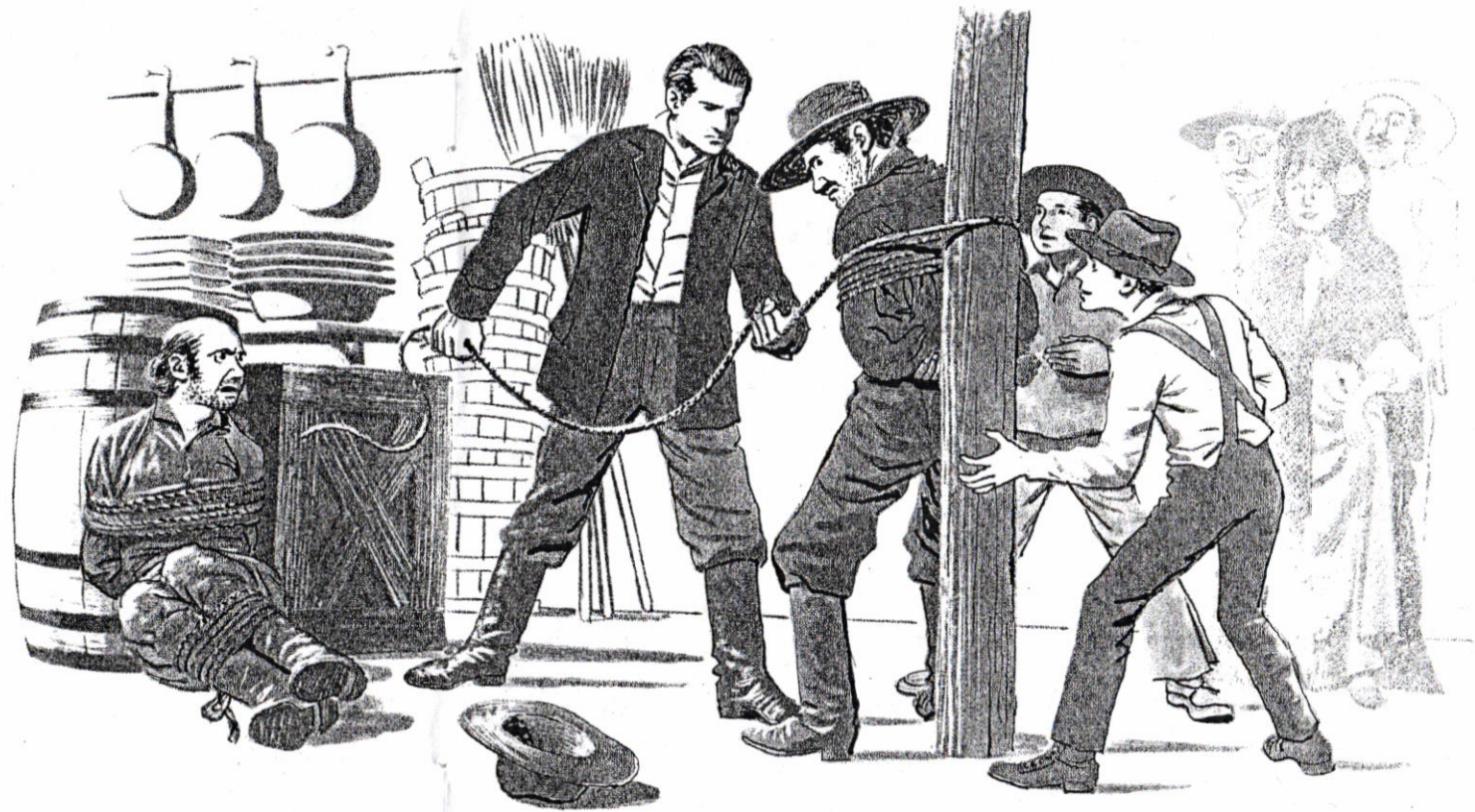
The Majesticons

Mexico, D.F.

Interview:
Themselves

Issue no. 1—All That Remains





Hello Readers. I hope there are a lot of you. My name is David Morris and this is the first issue of my 'zine,

Sleep Not Work. Hopefully it doesn't fall too easily into any of the convenient categories of 'zinedom - it's person-

al to a degree, but since so much of my personality is wrapped up in things like music and art and writing, it's

also a culture/criticism 'zine. I've decided to get things started in that vein by putting together some of the things

I've written with the intent of publishing them in other spaces, only to have them rejected. ~~So~~ I guess I had hoped

to get some sort of representative sample through this selection process, and to an extent it worked - we've got an inordinate amount of hip-hop writing, a jazz piece,

some fiction, and a couple of travel pieces. But as any writer can tell you, there's more than one little 'zine

worth of material to be found in the reject pile, so there was a somewhat subjective selection process - hopefully I left

out most of the stuff that really deserved to be rejected.

There was one thing that I really wanted to include here but couldn't find - a piece on abstract turntablism that I

wrote for the Aussie mag Stealth. They didn't publish it because they couldn't find pictures. There's also a lost interview with Sage Francis somewhere out there. Look for those next issue, if I get it together to find them.

If you find these rejects enjoyable, you can look for more of my stuff in recent and upcoming issues of MPR, Two Note Solo, and Skyscraper, and online at popmatters.com, audiogalaxy.com, and ugsmag.com. And soon, maybe, at sleepnotwork.com.

And in case you're wondering, yes, Sleepnotwork was the name of an experimental radio show I did at KVEX back in the day. I used to be all about that shit.

Thanks,

David Morris.



At this point, as the sun was beginning to come up, Antonio (the non-English speaking half of the duo who had picked me up) finally decided he had had enough. He grabbed Reynaldo (the English-speaking but by now very, very drunk one) and waved me back towards the car. Unfortunately, within mere feet of the car Reynaldo broke free and ran back towards the square, towards what was left of the party. Thankfully, Antonio let me into the car before going in search of him, so I didn't have to participate in the ensuing half-hour of fruitless searching. After Antonio gave up we went back to the apartment building, where both of us fell asleep without even taking our shoes off.

The next morning we found Reynaldo quivering on a bench in the town square, scrupulously ignored by the police, with his shirt torn and covered in strange rust-red stains. As far as I could decipher Antonio's dialogue with the nearby shoeshine man, the police had threatened Reynaldo a couple of times as he slept, but had been rebuffed by his persuasive drunken mumbles. There had also been a parade of tourists taking Reynaldo's picture as he lay there unconscious. We woke him up, took him back to the car and got him washed and conscious, then we all went and got a nice breakfast strangely enough, in the restaurant of the same club where we'd started the previous night. In the sober morning, both Reynaldo and Antonio became nice, decent guys Reynaldo didn't give the impression that this sort of binge was anything normal for him, or that he was particularly proud of it. So when they offered to drive me to San Luis Potosi, their hometown, which he said was even nicer than Allende, I accepted again, in part because of circumstances, since my only other option would have been to get a bus ticket back to Mexico City, without ever having gotten the relaxation which had been my original reason for coming out to the smaller towns.

Really, there's not much more to tell. Potosi was great, just like Allende in its cobbled streets and great architecture, though with a historical district that stretched quite far into the normal sphere of daily life. I got a fairly cheap private hotel room in a place where the bellhop was a 70 year-old Igor type. I walked around a lot, listened to my Walkman, and spent two days wondering why I'm so good at attracting strangers in foreign countries. I guess I just look like I need help. I got a bus back to D.F., stayed one more night in the same hostel, and got my plane back to the states. I'm very happy to be home.

So that's my trip, in a nutshell. I hope it was at least a little bit entertaining.



two guys who spoke no English. There's quite a bit of a blurring as the night progresses into 5 and 6 in the morning, as I started drifting in and out of dreamless sleep.

One of the moments I do distinctly remember is waking up to find myself crushed between the door and a half-dozen drunken Mexicans in the back seat. Each of them was screeching their ecstasy to the night, the girls letting their long hair stream through the windows, the guys, I'm sure, copping many a free drunken feel. Meanwhile, I could neither move nor feel my legs, or breathe without significant effort. Even remembering it right now is a bit difficult – I think I got a taste of what all those victims of concert-panic trampling must feel, and it wasn't pretty. Between the piercing shrieks and my limited Spanish, I didn't really have any way to tell anyone that I was headed for a serious panic attack, so after closing my eyes and making low, desperate moaning sounds for about five minutes, vainly hoping for instant empathy from a group of kids having way too much fun to spare any, I just waited until the car stopped momentarily, and wordlessly popped the passenger door. I and the guy in my lap rolled out, he laughing, I struggling to compose myself as quickly as I could. Finally I was able to get back in, though I did insist on riding in the other guy's lap and sticking my head out the window. Despite my limited Spanish, I know there were some jokes at the expense of my manhood over the course of the evening, but regardless I had no choice but to tag along, or else I would have been without a place to sleep when that sweet promise finally came to fruition.

The next thing I really remember was about a dozen of us, in the town square, at seven-something in the morning. I was slumped against a granite wall, at this point far beyond being bothered with anything but the vain quest for sleep, while the party posse swiftly drained yet another bottle of rum. By now the constant shrieks of feminine exhilaration were driving me completely batty – as far as I have been able to tell, the only behavioral models available to well-off Mexicans are the "wild and crazy" U.S. Greek Freaks on MTV Spring Break, and these girls were playing sorority to the fucking hilt. They and everyone else kept up a barrage of screaming, even as the cathedral bells rang and a campesino walked past taking his two children to mass, even as the cops made their indifferent circuits of the square.

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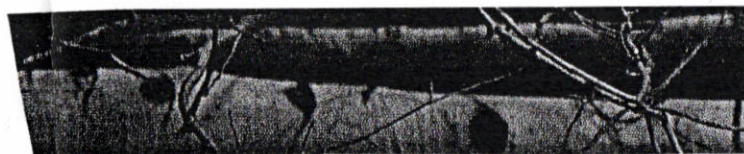
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Peter Brotzmann Hamid Drake William
Parker at Ceremony Hall May 2003 Presented
by Epistrophy Arts

What's at play between these three is the idea of a world unified. They are utopianists, dreaming from hand to mouth, from string to reed, dreaming of an underground river of sound there to be tapped by those willing to dig; flowing through a cave glittering crystalline from floor to ceiling and only growing more pristine and pure with each foot set there – because it's an idea, and like all of these must be fed.

Brotzmann, with handlebar mustache, looks like an aging gunfighter or pirate with enough grit in his craw to grind crabapples and copious lead yet to spit. Parker in tie-dyed pants and floral shirt and Gilligan hat shuffles easily through the proceedings. Drake in muscle-shirt and dreadlocks and beaded hat is the stoker, coaling up the belly of a fierce and beautifully demented machine that spiders and bludgeons and dances on a tidal wave of sound. Brotzmann on the clarinet and saxophone has the force and clarity of a great orator, or perhaps moralizer. The clarity is one that only gives the metanarrative's dissonance more power, the power to disorder even those who came braced against known uncertainty, the soldiery marching to the clatter of peace. Drake beats it out like a hundred precise millipedes, steadiness under the stuttering, the pulse of a universe that has not one but a multitude of rhythms that by pure happenstance coincide once in a long while. Drake and Parker together, the drums and bass trundling and walking and occasionally exploding in a leap for the stars, a jealous Babelonian grab for the ultimate unifying language of unshaped sound. And Brotzmann with the clear and winding and tumultuous river that runs beneath and up and through him.

These are men who have posited their life's work on the premise that something stands unseen not just between the three of them but between any two men or ten or two hundred, and that through love or talent or sheer tenacity or unbridled freedom an agreement can be reached, maybe not always, maybe not often, but sometimes, maybe only once in a thousand screaming nights, but sometimes, an agreement can be reached on



rescued from my own idiocy in this way, all I can say is, don't hate the player – hate the game.

I could tell almost instantly that I had nothing to fear from these guys, who had the unmistakable scent of the pan-cultural middle class. But the rescue was not to be without its costs. As I said before, the main reason Allende was so short of hotel rooms was that it's a huge weekenders' spot, and that's why these guys were here, so the first thing they wanted to do was go get a couple of drinks. After lugging my bags around for a few hours, there were few things that would have sounded better to me than chilling in a bar, so I let them drag me along to a fairly upscale joint (\$2 beers – cha-ching!) where the one of my new friends who spoke English mercilessly encouraged me to chat up the chicas. When I let him know, by way of defending my manhood, that I was kind of seeing someone back in the States, he laughed, and asked me: "Do you believe in loyalty? Because I do not!" With his half-unbuttoned shirt and pitch-perfect Latin Love Machine accent, he nearly had me spewing Sol through my nose.

Between my head cold, my exhaustion, and the creeping paranoia that I would lose track of these guys (and by consequence all my clothes, and my airplane ticket) forever, the night was less than completely enjoyable for me. In fact, as it stretched longer and longer, I started getting a little wigged out. Eventually (probably about 2am) we left the bar, and I thought I would get the sleep I had started to crave. Instead, about six folks crammed into the car I'd been picked up in, and we rendezvoused with another car full of people in an alley somewhere, and everyone started drinking straight from a bottle of Ron Rico. I abstained, as I would for the rest of the night, knowing that any slight strain on my delicate and deteriorating mind/body could leave me suddenly and permanently unconscious. Anyone who might have once spoken English had long since lost that capacity, but as far as I could figure out the guys who had picked me up had made a connection with another group of previously complete strangers, and had decided to take the party elsewhere. So first it was the alley, and then it was to an apartment which, I was told, was the one my new friends had rented, and which I would be sharing, as soon as the party wound down. I was completely done by now, so I went out and slept in the car. But then the car started up, and I found myself suddenly far from the bliss of a bed, on some unchosen errand with





"Conoces donde posiblemente hay cuartos?" One after the other, though, it was the same: No Hay Cuartos. No Hay Cuartos. I began to think about those revelers, almost Caucasian in their unthreatened happiness, and it occurred to me: this was Saturday night in a playground of the Mexican rich. Superb!

I had started out looking at cheap places, but soon I got indiscriminate, breaching the gates of Mediterranean courtyards, shuttered Bed and Breakfasts, and sprawling haciendas. Everywhere, the news was the same, and the news was bad. I was somewhat comforted when I ran into a couple of Mexican guys in the same predicament as I, in the tile-and-cherrywood lobby of a joint whose only available room was a \$90/night suite. An hour later, though, I was half-wishing I had whipped out the Mastercard and bitten the bullet. Having exhausted all of the options my Lonely Planet could offer me, I was now reduced to aimlessly wandering the streets, fantasizing about a dues ex machina in which a cheerful Dutch couple on holiday would cruise by and, instantly recognizing my predicament, offer me the guest room in their hillside summer home. Instead I stumbled upon a bunch of mounted police shutting down a too-rowdy cantina, and sat down on a bench in a small courtyard across the street to watch to watch an almost surreally calm conversation between two of the cops and the place's proprietress. It was about 11pm by now, which meant I'd been carrying two fairly heavy shoulder bags for nearly three hours straight. I had very little energy left (besides which I had a little bit of a head cold), and the sight of the cops got me thinking about the chances of safely sleeping in doorways, or on benches. They seemed, at least for the moment, to have enough to worry about without bothering indigent gringos.

At any rate, the cops weren't going anywhere, so I knew that I couldn't sleep in this particular park. So I reluctantly pulled up my bags and set off, I knew not where. Not wanting to get too far from the safe area of town, I vaguely retraced my steps, hungrily eyeing the dark sides of shadowed boulders, or sparse lines of bushes, wondering how long each location would protect me from getting rolled by some Mexican wino. I did find a couple of hotels I hadn't seen before, but by now most of the check-in desks weren't even open to turn me away. It was, however, after knocking rudely at one hotel's locked door for some time that a car pulled up. I didn't realize at first, but it was the two Mexican guys who had shared my frustration a few hotels previous. It turned out, they had gotten a room in an apartment building, and were offering to let me share with them. If it seems absurd and unfair that I should be

what that unseen thing is and how it can be given voice. But these are not just three blind men and this is not just an elephant – the unseen which they craft is a premise and an article of faith and a holy book whose pages must be written anew and read anew each night simultaneous, spontaneous – the only scripture that cannot be misused, because it floats into the ether to be preached no more, forever. They face inward, towards each other but also towards the unseen that they reach to speak for. The unseen that all of them are describing apart or together in ecstasy, the fluttering thing that each night must be sketched again and again, given form again each time different, because, well, that's life. Ain't it just.

But the conundrum of course is that every night isn't even enough. Drake can shovel the coal and the beast can crest its wave with all the ferocity of a lion rampant but still, still it's not enough to buzzsaw through your ears with a clarinet once or to trace the beating of your heart along the G string of a bass or to set your foot spastically tapping at the manic pace of a tightened snare because each moment the world is new and it must must be chased down constantly ec-statically forever. So if you can only breathe the air for one night you've no choice but to draw it ferociously refusing all valves and flood the universe of your lungs and your blood and your bone with the sounds of things taken apart in the search for reasons why. You might as well tap directly into the roiling pulse of the transverse, transfuse the universe, the bass-perfect pitch fulcrum searching for a lever long enough to move the world.

Skin your ears on unsmoothed surfaces and teeter on the edge of donning tribal masks, setting flame to all you once thought right and good, and going into the jungle to beat sticks together and slaughter animals. Catch in a bottle the sounds they make as they meet God and guard these jealously. After this there is and can only be the per-oxide sting of silence by comparison, after and before both nothing, only during is significant in its screaming and swirling maelstrom.

They describe the secret man the secret thing the secret at angled and sidelong glances, sometimes dimming their full force and revealing in the shadows of an easy lope or slow unfolding sweep more about it than any can through booklearning. They slink and flutter, they foray

and retreat. They interpret and become with furious precision. They are a magnificent squall and you walk into it without fear. They whisper mysteries to evil men. They growl at your daughters and your daughters swoon cold away and the next morning find themselves divinely pregnant. They are both conduits and creators. . They are ecstatic fucking peace, you fuckers. They are charmers of snakes.

The river is underground and the fish are blind. The church is new each day and yesterday is heresy. Rage against the doctors but don't ask for mercy for none will be given except the mercy of a sermon as one continuous roar that contains within it all the subtlety of the universe and all of its brutality and insanity too. In the protests of your ears you know you are alive. We all left the temple spent, sweating out the poisons and the truths bracing ourselves in the heat to go back to where time is discrete and predictably forward-moving and trustworthy and where revelations come in thirty-word soundbites not continuous and unending from the bellies of men who would be gods. We stumbled out half dead, those of us who chose to be so silent, and those of us who chose to speak finding little of consequence to say.

[The fine folks at KOOP asked me to write this for a newsletter they were trying to get going. Not surprisingly, after they read this piece of overwrought romance-novel criticism, they decided they'd rather go chew on lightbulbs]

This photo-

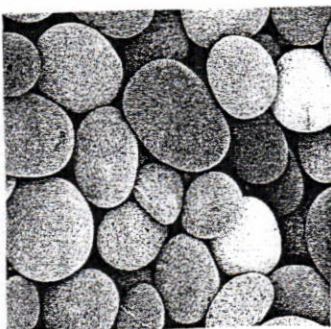


Goes with that story. —→

In fact, use your imagination ~~at~~
and put it on page 8 for me.
Thanks.

People got weak from hunger.

few days, trying to figure out where I wanted to go next, but I'd had no luck (the beach was 13 hours away, and most of the closer destinations sounded like little more than suburbs of D.F.), until that very next morning I found a listing for a town called San Miguel de Allende, which was described as a nice little colonial town, with lots of great churches and cobble streets, all of which is exactly what I was looking for after my time in the God-forsaken fifth-hole of Mexico City, full as it is of deceptive mariachis and strippers who only love you for your money. Allende was also only about four hours away by bus, which sounded like the perfect length of time in which to unwind before arriving. Even better, there was a hostel in town! Beautiful!



The Bus ride was nice. For 30 bucks I got a plush seat, a Manzana "Lift" brand apple soda, and a shrink-wrapped sandwich on a French roll. Unfortunately I also had to watch "A.I.", which, even in Spanish, is still totally shitty. By the time we arrived in Allende, dark was swiftly falling, and I was treated to the sight of a Notre Dame-size cathedral, its huge conical belltower wreathed in lights. I was pretty sure I'd made the right choice, and when I hit the streets to look for my hostel I was even more sure. At one point, in order to make a left turn, I had to walk up a flight of granite stairs, obviously centuries old, to get to the intersecting street, which was carried by a tiny bridge over the recessed street below. Everything was made of stone and stucco, and noone looked poor or hungry-which probably explained why the locals were so full of smiles and equatorial good cheer when I asked them for help finding the hostel. Fantastic!

But, woe is me, when I did find the hostel, it was obvious something terrible had happened. In fact, there was no hostel at all, just a dilapidated building, minus windows and plus some long grass around the foundation, with "Hostal is Closed" spray-painted on it, an ominous and dreadful lament in semi-gloss. I cursed a bit, and sulked for a moment, then talked briefly to the taco-stand operator next door to try and see if the place had just moved. I couldn't quite figure it out. Ultimately I trekked on, sure that with my Lonely Planet and halting Spanish I could find my way to a warm bed long before the coyotes came out. Frustratingly, the first hotel I came to was full. Well then,



January 5th 2003 – Kansas City, MO

paying. And not just to keep us company, either. I nearly jumped out of my skin when, as one of the girls who had just finished dancing came down from the stage, a hand came up and latched onto her (still-naked) boobie. I expected the trunchcons to come down and this guy to be dragged out of the place bloody. But apparently in Mexico it's completely okay to touch the girls. Crazy!!

Anyway, the club was, if not fun, at least interesting. Some of the girls were reasonably attractive, and I think I can understand a little better the hypnotic power of these places. I don't have any ambitions to end up at one in the States, but if it happens I'll have, if you will, a global perspective on the skin trade.

This email is getting too long, and I have to catch a bus. Coming up next?

- No Rooms At the Inn.
- Plucked From the Streets.
- Delightfully Rowdy Down Mexico Way.
- Crushed Nearly to Death in Clown Car.
- New Friends.
- Idle Days.

By the time you hear about all of this, I'll probably be back in the states. I'm about to head back to Mexico City (I'm in San Luis Potosi right now) and my plane leaves tomorrow.

I hope none of this was boring. This may sound crass, but I can't wait to be back in the good old U.S. of A.

From:sleepnetwork@hotmail.com
To:nomads@monkeymask.net
Subject: Mo' Mexico

I apologize in advance. I've got a bit of a sinus infection, my poo looks like peat moss, and I've been reading *Vice* (www.viceland.com) – be sure to hit up the “don'ts” all day, so I might not be my normally engaging self. Regardless, I've gotta finish telling you guys about my trip before it all drifts away. So here goes:

The day after the stripper/mariachi debacle, I decided that I had gotten the best story I could hope for out of Mexico City, short of getting kidnapped by a cab driver. I had actually been looking through my Lonely Planet for the preceding

The three men balanced their motorcycles, staring up the street and waiting for a gap. They were older and clean-cut, their bikes were expensive and black, and they wore helmets. They revved their engines in display. Then one saw a gap, sped off, and was followed closely by the second. But the third man missed it, was left idling and staring by himself, first for ten seconds, then twenty. He cranked his throttle. Tapped his foot. Glanced down the road, toward his departed fellows. Then, finally, saw an opening, and inched forward—only to back off once more.

I lost interest. I used to say uncharitable things about people I didn't know, but I've stopped. The coffee shop crowd was divided between chatty high-schoolers and sad thirty-somethings. I guess that's what you get in a big city without a nearby college.

It's an off-season Sunday night in Kansas City, MO, and I can't find much to do but sit here and type and watch. It's a shame, as it seems like a nice city, beautiful and friendly and most nights, I imagine, fairly flush with happenings for an out-of-towner to sink anonymously into. But today, and so far tonight, I've been conspicuously alone. I talked to a couple of record store clerks, had a nice conversation with my waitress at the Greek restaurant, just enough to convince me that the people are nice.

A latterday reunion with aloneness is like running into an old friend you ditched as soon as something better came along. I've decisively thrown off the antisocial yoke of high school misfit legacy, and the scattershot map of my once-scarce friendships now bursts bloody in Austin and spreads erratically across the whole country. But no points here, no contacts or acquaintances. It's the Midwest, after all, and there's nothing in the Midwest, so of course no friends. Not yet, at least – the Midwest is being discovered. Nelly's

from St. Louis.

It shouldn't be a problem. I am, if I do say so myself, a pretty friendly guy, and this is a friendly town, full of people who seem to be on my wavelength. It shouldn't be a problem for me to find a party tonight, or at least have a few nice, cordial, informative conversations. It shouldn't be a problem, except that I've thrown up a bit of a barrier for myself. You see, I've got to go back to work in less than a week, back to the first 'real' job I've ever had. I consider it a 'real' job because, for example, I've got to have a normal haircut. Which is why, at the start of this, my last break for a while, I shaved my head. Oh, you ask, what's so weird about shaving your head? Well, I only shaved one side of it. One-third of it, to be more exact, without touching the rest. So if you look at my head from one side, I look like a none-too-adventurous office drone, maybe a computer tech. But from the other side, I look like Travis Bickle. Remember, that picture goes here.

I didn't realize what an aesthetic disaster this was until I was here, far away from the scissors and clippers I needed to correct it. It was an experiment from the outset, and sometimes you need a while to really gather data on these things. Repeated inspections in bathroom mirrors, and so on. I thought maybe it would play on the electroclash/no-wave/fucked-up glam tip. Needless to say, my data show that it does not. So I'm stuck here, stranger in a strange town, looking like the only thing worse than a serial killer - someone who *wants to look like a serial killer*.

Aside from isolation, I've also almost forgotten the sensation of looking weird. Which is not to comment on my recent appearance (dreadlocks, if you must know), so much as on the astronomical freak factor in Austin, where anything short of voluntary amputation leaves you comfortably within the mainstream. Because looking weird is, obviously, a matter of perception, and conversely, choosing to look weird (by whatever local



energy to even try and decipher it, especially since the only numbers I immediately saw were something about '10%-20%', which clearly made no sense. Our Spanish simply wasn't good enough to get a decent explanation, especially coupled with the Rumsfeldian shock and awe of the numbers themselves. Finally, after a moment more of clutching our heads in disbelief, we emptied our wallets out on the table (in my case literally-who carries more than 500 pesos around Mexico City at night?) and stumbled into the cold night air.

I've talked to a couple of people since then and I think I know what happened. While mariachis will typically charge on a per-song basis if you specifically request that they play for you, no one I've run into (and I'm talking about Mexicans here) is familiar with a setup of bars adding a charge to your tab just because mariachis are playing for everyone. Especially since we were lured into the bar with the guarantee of 'No hay Cover!', it seems pretty clear that we got the gringo price on this one-in other words, we got shaken down.

This was what we instinctively figured at the time that it happened, gripped as we each were with the typical self-loathing and impotent rage of the victim. I figured the strip club was pretty much out of the question at this point, and despite my fury at what had just happened, I was a little relieved. Turns out, though, that Gabe had another couple of hundred pesos socked away, and was ready to spend it. Another one of the pitchmen came up to tell us about the pretty girls at Club Ántrax, and once Gabe figured out that there was, once again, No Cover, and that beers were about 30 pesos each, we were off again. If all of this sounds ominous, don't worry. In the end the strip club played us considerably straighter than the mariachis, believe it or not.

This was my first time in a strip club, anywhere, so I didn't know quite what to expect. The place was dark and smokey, though no more so than any rock club in Austin. When we walked in, there was a girl dancing, still fully clothed. The server sat us at a table where one girl was already in position, and another swiftly detached herself from the roughly twelve sitting on benches around the edges of the room, all scantily clad. These two girls immediately started making small talk with us, but while Gabe gamely chatted in Spanish, I took the opportunity to plead complete ignorance and make Ronald Reagan-style 'I can't hear you over the music' gestures to the girl trying to separate me from my money. Gabe went to the bathroom, and my complete studied indifference quickly got rid of both of them. We later discovered that, had we been gentlemen and bought them drinks (these mysteriously costing 70 pesos instead of the 30 we were paying for our own), the girls would have basically been ours for as long as we kept

Main Heading

only lasted for about a minute. Our waiter was a very old, very stooped man who lit our cigarettes for us while exuding nearly overpowering, totally silent disdain. This actually just added to the great atmosphere, complementing the array of cracked stained glass windows, dark booths, and leather chairs. My new friend and I were finding one another's company quite enjoyable. We had a few beers each, jumping to the (normally fairly reasonable) conclusion that, since we were the only visible gringos, we didn't need to worry too much about what they cost. Second mistake.

My friend (Gabe, btw), again playing the forceful New Yorker, let me know that we would hit the strip club next. By now I was three beers in, and not quite so intimidated by the idea of a Mexican strip club. Then, oh, pause of dramatic pauses, then came the bill. Neither of us were quite sure what we were seeing, and stared at it in mutual stunned silence until, first, we comprehended the big number at the bottom- 900 pesos, or roughly ninety dollars. Okay. Wait. That cannot be right. It there anything in Mexico that costs ninety dollars? Mentally sequestering the idea that we might actually have to pay this money, we instead concentrated on reverse-engineering the number itself. Okay, cinco cervezas, setenta y cinco por cada. That's like seven fucking dollars a beer! Is it possible that these smiling Mexican families in their ranchero shirts, these tanned and callused lovers of Mariachi and cockfights that surround us, are really paying nearly seven dollars a piece for their beers? Well, maybe they really loved Mariachi.

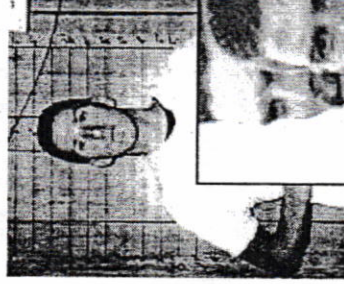
Regardless, even five beers at seven dollars a piece and one tequila at . . . ten? Shit . . . didn't even come close to ninety dollars. We continued staring slack-jawed at the bill, with the maitre'd standing by protectively the whole while, clearly reading in our dumbfounded awe the possibility that we would make a run for it. Then we noticed two extra lines at the bottom of the bill, which we were both still too stunned to properly interpret, even though Gabe speaks much better Spanish than I do.

These two lines equaled nearly fifty dollars, or half of the bill. Gabe vaguely gestured at the entries, and the maitre'd vaguely gestured at a note on the bottom of the menu-the menu we had not looked at once. I could not at this point spare the

Kansas City

standard) is an act of provocation. When you are 14 and have a friend shave "FUCK" into the back of your purple-tinted fade, you are saying something. Of course, what you think you are saying (i.e. "I reject your bland aesthetics, your repressive morality, and your entire system of bourgeois values!") is often different than what you are actually saying (i.e. "I would like to requisition a severe beating from the hockey team!")

On my way to KCMO, I passed through Oklahoma City. Oklahoma City is, as far as I could tell, some sort of Midwestern Detroit, blighted not by economic devastation and pointless violence but by soul-skewering emptiness. Even in the middle of downtown on a Saturday, I felt like I was on the prairie, not least because the only thing to see there was the truly harrowing memorial dedicated to the 1995 Murrah Federal Building bombing victims.



The sidewalks, on a Saturday, were the bottoms of desert canyons, unpopulated and silently threatening (though, in fairness, the waving wheat sure did smell sweet when the wind came right behind the rain).

I used to say uncharitable things about cities I didn't know, but I've stopped. All of this is only relevant because it was in Oklahoma City that I experienced The Whisper for the first time in, I guess, nearly five years. The Whisper is demonstrative, shocked, and, though I only just realized it, rich in pathos. Sometimes it is meant to be 'overheard', which I think is the only logical explanation for the truly grandiose "Did you see that guy?" that I got in OK. Actually, the woman said it to her husband twice.

Kansas City

If I were still 14, or if, God forbid, I was from Oklahoma City, I probably would've gotten off on this, smugly cursing their closed-mindedness and patting myself on the back for challenging it. But now, I was just kind of, well, *amused*—especially when I turned around and caught the poor woman in the middle of repeating her question. With her hand in front of her mouth and



her eyes wide, she was Marilyn Manson's wet dream of Middle American discomfiture. *Shocked, shocked I say!* I'm well past wanting to provoke anyone with the way I look, simply because, where I live, it's impossible. In wastelands like Oklahoma City (or Fort Worth, Texas, where I grew up), boys in mascara and girls who shave their heads are struggling against unseen bonds, crying out for help, counting the days until they can escape to the nearest big city. But when people get creative with their looks in Austin, they're just trying to get laid.

Getting The Whisper was not unpleasant. It's nice to know that there are still people in our culture capable of being shocked—there will be people left to rebuild our proud culture after homosexual marriage and affirmative action have wiped out the rest of us. It was also reassuring to find out that the self-satisfied snicker of the misfit handily loses out to the robust laugh of the accepted and fulfilled. Of course, I'm not telling all those goth kids in Lawrence, Kansas and Pittsburgh, Illinois (God bless 'em, whether they want it or not) to pour out their cosmetics and trade their trenchcoats for Dockers. I'm just realizing how vital it is to find yourself a city, a scene, at the very least a crowd that won't give you the Whisper over its collective shoulder when you're just trying to be yourself.

I forgot to get back to Kansas City. Anyway, it was pretty cool. I wish I had had time to get to St. Louis. Oh, well.

{This was never actually rejected from anywhere, because I never submitted it anywhere. I'd like to do some travel writing, but unless someone's willing to let me ramble on about my hair I doubt much will come of it. I don't have much

Mexico City Nearly Killed Me

I, like other sentient beings, love to travel. I also love writing about my travels. This is a lot different from the thing about going to Kansas City—it was written as an e-mail to my friends in the U.S. This means it was written fast, at a per-hour internet café, and it also means it was written informally, without a lot of the literary excess I'm normally so into. It's a story of something that happened to me, and in this case, I think that's enough.

From: sleepnotwork@hotmail.com
To: nomads@monkeymask.net
Subject: Mexico Dreamin'

Allright everyone, sorry it took so long for me to get around to this, but you need not wait any longer. Prepare to be regaled with the incredibly true adventures of David in Mexico. Warning, this email is long, and there's more to come.

When I last mailed you I was just a couple of days into my trip, and had seen a couple of nice sighs in Mexico city, but since then it's been a veritable whirlwind of misadventure, misdirection, and even a little malfeasance. Actually the malfeasance came pretty early in the game, during my last day in D.F. I fell in with this guy from the Bronx, and we decided to go out to world famous Garibaldi Plaza. This is where all of the Mariachis wait around to be picked up for their jobs in other parts of the city, so it's just one big swarm of guys with gargantuan guitars wearing formal sombreros. Which was all good, until my friend decided that he wanted to get a drink. There were dozens of guys on the plaza trying to get our attention, including one in particular who was apparently working for two different establishments—a mariachi bar, and the strip club right next door. 'No Cover!', the guy said. My friend decided he wanted to hit the strip club, and I was close to yielding to him (he teaches science in the Bronx, so he's considerably more headstrong guy), but I think he sensed my discomfort, and we went to the mariachi bar instead. Not to get to far ahead of myself, but this was our first mistake.

The bar turned out to be pretty cool. There was a decent band, not something I'd pop into my walkman, but very nice for mariachi, and a rotating cast of four singers on a stage in the middle of the restaurant. The best part was the mock-cockfight, which involved two real fighting chickens, but no blades, and

The Source). But sadly, unlike old Sid's widely televised performance, and despite the creativity of *Beauty Party*'s attacks, it's unlikely that anyone who's targeted is actually listening. It's far below the radar of the average rap radio thrall, and lord knows Ja Rule has never heard of Mike Ladd. So, on one level this is all just a wink and a nudge from Ladd to the underground choir – "Isn't Fabulous just fucking ridiculous? Yeah, I think so, too." But *Beauty Party* is saved from being such a tired and insular exercise by both the excellence of its execution and, more interestingly, by its implicit admission that the bling-bling persona is pretty damn fun to play around with. Every performance here is enthusiastic, and you get the sense that everyone involved is ecstatic to not be spitting yet *another* moralistic, screw-faced polemic. As a devoted underground listener, I'm anything but pro-flossin', but it's also a true breath of fresh air to hear something so out of the ordinary from my favorite artists. Certainly we want truth, justice, and the independent-as-fuck way to win out in the end – but for the length of this record, at least, I'm rooting for the Empire.

[Rejected from Popmatters.com—well, not really rejected. It was my trout piece, and I got the reviewer position, but they already had a review of the record, so they couldn't use it. Then I sent it to hiphopinfinity.com, and they never responded. I'm not sure what their problem is, they still don't have a review of this record. I think it's because they're not selling the record, and they can't be bothered to post a positive review about something they're not selling. But if they're selling the record, oh, then they love that shit to death. Also, it should be disclosed that these are the guys who posted a scathing review of Big Jus's "Gaffling Whips" EP, possibly contributing to Jus's full length not getting released in the U.S. Then, a couple of months ago a new Big Jus album came out, a kind of political thing that it looked like everyone was loving, so they added it to their stock, wrote a glowing review of it, and removed the old, embarrassing review of the "Gaffling Whips" EP from their review archives. Way to stick to your guns, fellas.]

discipline—I would have to grit my teeth all the way through if I were writing, say, "10 Great Places to Stay in Kansas City". I guess that's what separates those who are able to live off their writing from those who aren't.)

The Top 25 Singles of the Last 25 Years:

1. Run DMC – King of Rock
2. Sex Pistols – Anarchy in the U.K.
3. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five – The Message
4. Public Enemy – Welcome to the Terrordome
5. Kurtis Blow – Christmas Rappin'
6. Public Enemy – Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos
7. Dr. Dre – Nothin' but a "G" thang
8. Wu – Tang Clan – Wu-Tang Clan Ain't Nuthing ta Fuck Wit
9. Michael Jackson – Billie Jean
10. Dr. Octagon – Earth People
11. Snoop Dogg – Gin and Juice
12. Peter Gabriel – Games without Frontiers
13. Parliament – Flashlight
14. Talking Heads – Life During Wartime
15. Rammellzee vs. K-Rob – Beat Bop
16. Missy Elliot – Git Ur Freak On
17. Eric B. and Rakim – Paid in Full
18. Notorious B.I.G. – Big Poppa
19. GZA – Duel of the Iron Mic
20. Nas – Halftime
21. Schooly D – "P.S.K. – What does it Mean?"
22. Gang of Four – At home he's a tourist
23. DJ Shadow – Stem/Long Stem
24. Outkast – Bombs over Baghdad

[Put together for Popmatters.com for an article that has yet to run, and probably never will. I basically had hoped this list would somewhat offset the indie/punk centrism of most of the other writers there, so there's lots of hip hop. I'm sure you're fascinated.]

I've been struggling with MC Paul Barman for months now, listening to his new album, interviewing him, then writing and rewriting in pursuit of a few paragraphs that might sum up my very profound and important thoughts about him. He's a rapper, not very well known, but no longer unknown, either. He's white, and his music defies many previous hip hop standards. But these days, with underground hip hop at a vibrant peak of integration and innovation, this doesn't make him particularly unique.

MC Paul Barman- *Extremely White*

What is unique, and what has left me trapped in a contemplative cul-de-sac for so long, is that, very soon after his emergence on the independent music scene, this particular white, non-traditional MC became a sudden locus of

controversy, and even a target of scorn, for other independent hip hop artists and for the fans of the music. Anti-Barman manifestoes were issued, and from record stores to message boards, a debate raged over whether Barman deserved any artistic respect, whether he was a joke, whether he was corrupting and destroying hip hop. Now, with the recent release of his debut full-length, "Paulehjah!", the shit may again be on its way to the fan.

At first glance, Barman's music bears a lot of resemblance to such novelties as "Rappin' Rodney" (Dangerfield, that is) and 2 Live Jews (whose "Kosher as they Wanna Be" I recommend without hesitation). Starting with his name, moving to his clothes and demeanor, all the way through to his stiff lyrics and clumsy delivery, Barman mines the old "white people are so lame" schtick: he's playing the Jim Carrey roles on In Living Color, and willingly providing material for a decade's worth of Def Comedy Jams ("You see, white people be rap-pin' like *this*...").

Barman reveals more complexity on closer examination, but it's his overall image that has fueled so much controversy. The leader of the contrarian pack is Sage Francis, a Rhode Island rapper who, shortly after the release of Barman's first EP, posted a passive-aggressive "open letter" on various message boards and websites, in a supposed attempt to open dialogue with Barman. The letter

Majesticons

"Piranha Party", "Game Party", and "Fader Party" (analogous to B2K's "Bump Bump Bump", DMX's "Who We Be" or M.O.P.'s "Anie Up"), the deeper funk of "Majestwest Party" and "Suburb Party" (Ladd's versions of "In the Club" or "Hot in Here"), and the poolside R&B of "Helicopter Party" (think "Ignition"). Ladd's beats are pitch-perfect for the task at hand, marrying just the right hint of undie ruggedness to the zoomy blips and glissandos of his pop templates.

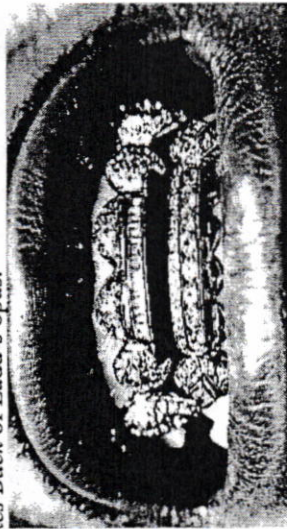
Images for this review courtesy of GoldTeeth.com. At Goldteeth.com, you can find a wide variety of high-quality fronts, caps, fangs, and plates. GoldTeeth.com has provided gold teeth to members of the Wu-Tang Clan, and their reputation is unsurpassed in the business. Word!

Still, it's really the MCs who make the album. In occupying the various personae of the pop-rap spectrum, Ladd's chosen crew of undergrounders take us on humorous and frequently insightful forays into the mind and follies of the archetypal baller. Probably most poetic is Abyss, who on "Brains Party" depicts 'Primadon A' as exactly the sort of melancholy schemer that most of us would like to find behind the masks of Puff Daddy and his ilk - money and power can't fill the hole in his soul, but still he chases them, imagining a day when "The world takes on the shape of my pockets". Murs, playing a parallel universion of himself, confronts an altogether different strain of falsehood on "Majestwest Party" as a prototypical frontin'-ass nigger, milking the ghetto for stories that he spins into platinum ("I don't have a real set, so I just claim Crip"). El-P and Vast Aire are unapologetically bougie on "Suburb Party", and El's over-the-top verse is probably the funniest on the album: "In the front row of the Sotheby's auction all day/ Pump a fist, Tiffany egg on both wrists - it's bliss!"

Everything here can be roughly analogized to Sid Vicious' rendition of "My Way" - mainstream standards and forms more or less subtly twisted into a big ol' "Fuck You" back at the source (and in this case, back at

dary, and that creativity still matters. These misguided individuals will, thanks to Ladd and the Majesticons, be slowly and steadily re-educated until we can all bling together, forever.

Of course, not really. Ladd (mellifluously billed here as Jay Waskowitz, Esq.) has the track record to prove that him selling out would be as likely as catching L.L. without a hat. Ladd scored a major coup in getting his edgy first album, "Easy Listening 4 Armageddon", released by Mercury way back in 1997, and he went on to establish his own Ozone label and release the work of luminary hip-hop experimenters such as Sonic Sum, Anti-Pop Consortium and Saul Williams. Now Ladd has undertaken a conceptual project that he says will ultimately consist of three albums chronicling the ongoing battles between underground purity and the deceptive seductions of pop stardom. The Infesticon's gritty *Gun Hill Road*, released in 2000, was the optimistic kickoff of the trilogy, introducing the insurrectionist heroes and handing them a few minor victories. For this second volume, Ladd gives a cadre of the underground's finest the roles of insidious Majesticons, and the villains finally reveal the true extent of their power. This makes *Beauty Party* the bleak and sardonic *Empire Strikes Back* of Ladd's opus.



With its firm grasp of satire and irony, *Beauty Party* is a conceptual mindbomb whose great beats mask some deep analysis. Ladd's production ranges over the FM style spectrum with an alacrity that gives it the feel of a training simulation – this may not be the enemy, but it sure sounds like them. There's the teeth-grinding tweaker intensity of

MC Paul Barman

backhandedly implied or stated outright that Barman was guilty of various types of stylistic theft, egregious egotism, cultural ignorance, general mistreatment of his fellow artists, and disrespect for hip hop as a whole.

But the part of the letter that struck me most was when Francis claimed that "The fact that you [Barman] represent a huge population of white people in this country is being exploited...and they could care less if you have paid your dues or not." This is an old sentiment, which has been lobbed at The Beastie Boys, House of Pain, Eminem, and many many other white rap artists over the years. The thing that floored me, and the thing that was new and different, is that Sage Francis is *himself* white. A white MC, with a largely white fan base, accusing another MC, also white, of exploiting his whiteness to get ahead. You may find yourself asking, as I did, how this makes any fucking sense at all.

It does, but only when you look at the current racial politics of the hip hop underground. You see, most white rappers (of which, in case you didn't know, there are many) reside in a relatively small segment of the hip hop spectrum. Those of any artistic merit (i.e. those not named White Dawg, Milk Bone, or some such) tend to gravitate towards rap's avant-garde edge. Such artists include Aesop Rock, the Anticon collective, Atmosphere, Sage Francis himself, and many others. I'd estimate that more than half the artists in this particular corner of hip hop are white.

Back in the day, white rappers caught unending flack for not being from the streets, for apparently "stealing" black culture. But the experimental hip hop scene has successfully thrown off this yoke, premising legitimacy on dedication to hip hop itself rather than on skin color or background. Gaps are bridged daily. Amazing artists have sprung out of the suburbs of the Midwest and Minnesota, and gone on to make great music with artists from Oakland and NYC, brought together by common artistic sensibilities. The art and style of this scene are a seamlessly wild hybrid of its white and black cultural sources, similar in spirit to the early-Eighties art disco/No Wave circuit in NYC. In this newer incarnation, thrift store chic once again rubs up against streetwear - hoodies and gimme caps; Atari t-shirts and Ecco shoes; Fro-hawks and aviator glasses. The music is just as much of a crazy experiment, with artists inspired by Front 242, Pavement, Stockhausen, Wu-Tang, Erik B., and Parliament in equal measure.

MC Paul Barman

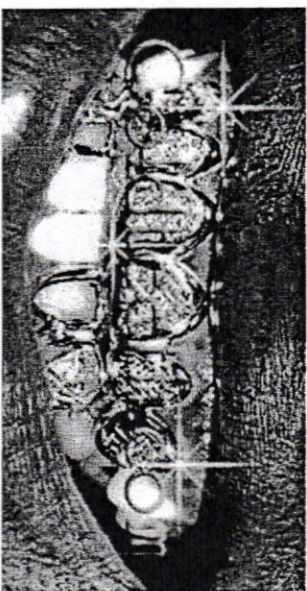
With his imperfect delivery, goofy persona, and self-conscious references to highbrow culture, MC Paul Barman is counter to everything this scene stands for. Rather than a harmonious union of inspirations, his music is a violent graft of white sensibility onto black music, a passion play of shameless appropriation whose greatest charms—errant diction in particular—arise from Barman's lack of exposure to in-the-flesh hip hop culture. When I spoke to him recently, he took great pains to assure me that where he was growing up in New Jersey, he was very into hip hop—watching Video Music Box, “getting all of the radio waves,” and being turned on to new stuff by friends. “Friends at camp, especially”. This is, frankly, pretty similar to the way that some of the best MCs now working gained their first exposure to hip hop. But the difference between them and Barman is that they found collaborators, joined the culture and worked within it. Instead of entering the hip hop subculture, Barman made music on his own, and then, when Prince Paul decided to produce his first EP, he was suddenly thrust into a hip hop community he had little working knowledge of.

When Sage Francis accuses Barman of appealing to “a huge nation of white people” who “couldn’t give a shit whether you’ve paid your dues or not,” he’s referring less to white people per se than to people (of whatever race) who are not down with the hip hop scene. Despite the recent acclaim accorded to Anticon, Def Jux, and others, indie hip hop is still fighting, still hungry, still not where it wants to be, and I think Sage is expressing a well-grounded fear that what was amazing and new two years ago could be watered down by an influx of clueless gawkers like Barman, fans and artists with no sense of history or integrity, and then sink under its own weight. Sage cites Barman’s disrespect for his fellow artist’s achievement, as when Barman claimed “Noone has done this before!” in reference to his use of complex writing techniques. That kind of ignorance must be fought.

The other impulse that lies behind Sage Francis’ letter is about race. A lot of people, artists in particular, are worried that MC Paul Barman is *making white people look bad*, that he is undermining the work that Sage and others have done to create a scene where art can be made, relatively unencumbered by racial politics. Barman, with his aggressively intellectual, dandyish, neurotic, twitzy persona, with his appeal so premised on a well-played ignorance of hip hop, is, at

Majesticono—Beauty Party

A little bit loyal opposition and a little bit hateriffic, hip-hop’s fringe is always calling out pop-oriented acts for the shallowness of their music, the hypocrisy of their politics, and their crass trading of hip-hop’s cultural cachet for a quick payout. But for all the nipping there’s been precious little change—shallow lyrics, superficial personas and fluffy tracks still infiltrate the hip-hop charts, and there’s no reason to think anything will be changing soon. Well, for all you frustrated revolutionaries, for you who have continually failed to dent the monolith of mainstream hip-hop, Mike Ladd has a modest proposal. This battle cannot be won, he says—you know it in your hearts. Leave off your pointless battle against the deadly blinding rays of planet Neptune, and come to where the sun is bright and the Courvostier plentiful. Here, your hunger and talent will finally bring you the rewards you so richly deserve. It’s time for all of us—commercial or underground, backpackers and ballers alike—to join hands and become one in jiggly fabulousness.



Underground rappers finally brought ‘round to the proper Zen mantra (“Make money, make money, make money money mon-ay”), Ladd’s Majesticons have under his enlightened tutelage traded their dour moralizing and obscure beats for the greener pastures of party anthems, self-aggrandizement, and materialism. They have allied with the mighty old-money Trusticons, and will from this mutually advantageous position march over the feeble opposition of the Infesticons, a rabble of self-styled puritans who cling to the sad delusions that their music can remain good-hearted, that commercial concerns are second-

doing, trying to live in the moment.

Denouement

Dave: Just to wrap up, you guys want to talk about what you've got coming up next? You've got a remix album, for *Themselves*?

Dose: Which is pretty cool, we don't have to do any work. We just sent out ProTools files, get 'em back, do the art. So we have the remix record, we're working on the new *Subtle* record that'll be out in a while.

Dave: And the *Subtle* will be a full-length?

Dose: Yeah, yeah, which'll be all brand-new material. We have one more E.P., which is the *Spring E.P.*, and that's the end of that series.

Jel: I'm doing a follow-up to *10 Seconds*, I'm working with miscellaneous people all over the states. The new *Sole* record, *Project Blowed*, *Anticon*.

Dave: You've got tracks on the new *Sole*?

Jel: Yeah, I've got two tracks, one's on the "12". Actually, two're on the "12", the instrumental to one of the songs on the album is on the "12".

Dose: The new *Why?* record, too

Jel: The new *Why?* there's like three songs I did on that. There's always something new coming out. We're on the new *Krush* album, I don't know if that's out.

Dose: Yeah, we did the song, Jeff did the beat for *Krush* and we all rapped on it, posse-cut style.

Dave: Is that the same one with *Company Flow*, "*Zen*"?

Dose: No, it's the newer one. This has *Anti-Pop* on it, and a bunch of other people.

Jel: I think that's it.

[This interview was rejected by several magazines. *XLR8R* said in advance they weren't interested in doing any *Anticon*-related stuff anymore. I think *Urb* was the only mag to respond in detail, saying that *Jel* and *Dose* didn't have anything interesting to say in the interview. I guess I'm a fan, but to me it seems like fairly interesting stuff.]

MC Paul Barman

least in part, performing whiteface minstrelsy. He invites listeners to equate his race and his ineptitude. In a subculture so premised on integration, so dedicated to the concept that your love of hip hop is all it takes to belong, it should be obvious why these ideas might not fit in.

It's not easy to get a bead on Barman's fan base. At one show, I noticed a lot of people who didn't look like rap fans – but also many who obviously were. Barman's CDs are sold and reviewed on websites that specialize in *Anticon* and *Def Jux*-style music, sites that encompass more traditional hip hop, and more indie-rock oriented sites. It makes sense, of course – people well-versed in hip hop are most likely to get Barman's joke, but it's squarely targeted at hipsters. Veteran hip-hoppers are more likely to be immune to the more insidious aspects of his persona, but those with no knowledge of hip hop beyond MTV garbage (which includes a surprising number of supposed music nerds) could very easily be led to believe that Paul Barman is representative of white people in rap. Maybe cool, confident *Eminem* is an anomaly. Maybe the only way the melanin-deprived can express themselves in rhyme is by making fun of their own ridiculousness. And maybe only white people can rap about, you know, smart stuff. His motivations are doubtless innocent, and he's almost certainly harmless. But the slenderest possibility that he could spread this sort of thinking should have us all taking a long, hard look at him.

[Rejected without comment from the *Skyscraper* website – I think it was more a matter of them not having time to put it up than of not liking it, which is a shame – despite the lack of subtlety in my observations here, I stand by the piece and think it contains some important observations.]



We did it after the last of the Freudians were gone. I say gone – but not gone at all, just turned into book critics for the Times, no longer preoccupied with people's actual minds. And I say we, as if there were some group, a cadre of five or ten or a hundred, smoking cigarettes and counting minutes. But I can't count myself among any sort of group in that sense – others had set into motion certain plans, and I happened to be around when the time came.

We called them Reyes, though I never saw anything kingly in them. No, I'm getting ahead of myself already. It's strange, almost funny, how difficult it still is for me to think coherently, to create meaning by imposing structure.

What do you do, when you are waiting for death? Do you find darkness, accept the uncertain certainty, occupy a weightless, silent, blind vigil, choose paralytic suspension and yield yourself before it is taken? Do you stay in the light, face something, anything preferable to that passive emptiness, anything less terrifying than nothingness?

Or do you run?

Futile, certainly. And the worst of all options if you have ever held ambitions of a peaceful death. But no one who was there could be blamed. It don't know how I willed myself to lie down and wait.

We put them in a carefully crafted jungle environment, thick with foliage and shadows. We did it because they looked like tigers as much as anything. Maybe there was a bit of romanticism to it. Maybe they looked like tigers because of what we made for them. Wait. How is that possible?

There may have been a way to stop them from opening the door. I'm not interested anymore. I don't think about it. But there were more of us, and stronger, than those two traitors (no, no, they weren't traitors, they made no choices, they were weak). Why did they need people to open the doors for them in the first place? From what we saw afterwards, they could have effortlessly torn them from their hinges, or taken less obvious routes.

There was a claw where one had not been. A claw? No, air, but not quite air.

Dave: I guess I'd like to go back to one of my earlier questions about the progression between the records, and rephrase it in a different way. How do you guys feel about your relationship to hip-hop, how your feelings about hip-hop have changed, since you've started doing it, to today? Obviously you're not necessarily even doing hip-hop all the time now.

Jel: Myself, I don't really feel it's changed much. The music I do with [Dose], I feel has changed, but when I'm doing music for another MC, I still just do a beat. But definitely, working with him, working with fellow musicians, I want to put a little more musicianship into it, like I'll have a beat, I'll have a rapper go over it, and I always want to stick with it for a while, play over it, expand it. So that's the only thing that I feel has changed much, production-wise.

Dose: It's become music, too. I think the nature of that question totally applies to a mind-set that we don't really hold. I feel that someone like Jeff, who was into many kinds of music, whether it was Can and PRT or any combination of music, before I was into a lot of music, Jeff was into a lot of music, being a producer, and I feel like he considered himself a musician. Hence there wasn't much of a change, he was just making music with a sampler - though none of us are musically trained. And now I feel the same way, now I feel I'm doing music, I don't feel I'm doing hip hop. But I have memorized 80,000 rap records, and have a ground in that arena, so I can whip that around over my head. But when I'm singing, I'm either self-conscious, or not, and I feel that we're the same way about playing instruments. It's very relative.

Jel: We think that hip hop music is good, we love it.

Dave: Obviously the question comes from a kind of simplistic mindset. Dose: Yeah yeah yeah. We're not really all that ... a lot of the critique and labeling of our music has to do with us being concerned with being complex, and really when we sit down to do music, we're just trying to get it out of our system, and that's not really a complex thing. We don't really think about Hip Hop vs. What We're Doing, we're just doing what we're

Themselves

Dave: SP-1200, yeah, but on the Themselves record, I definitely heard other things, I heard that Dr. Sample digital crunch.

Dose: Did we use the Dr. Sample? Eeeeh, no, but there's some dirty stuff.

Jef: Anything dirty, it's the SP.

Dose: The SP is actually dirtier than the Dr. Sample. There's a ring mod sound on the Dr. Sample that's manipulated once in a while.

Dave: I know that there's stuff I heard on the cLOUDDEAD record that's similar.

Dose: That's also a product of layering and 12-bit. But we used a lot of keyboards, and a lot of crap. Like the first record, it was Jeff and records. And this record, we liked the cLOUDDEAD aesthetic, we used our fucking bedroom. Like Kiki . . . Oh, I'm sorry, "You Devil You", it's one of the last songs on the record, I think the ninth song.

Jef: That's just us mic'ing ourselves in the bathroom.

Dose: Smacking on shit. Pipes.

Jef: And then once the rhythm was down we played keyboards over it.

Dose: So that's an extreme example of how organic it can be. And then there are things like "Knot full (?)" the song with me and Jeff rapping, where that's pretty much an SP beat, and some hand-shakers.

Jef: And that's meant to acknowledge early-nineties hip-hop, and that's all SP.

Dose: And that was strict and fundamental for the sake of having it be fundamental. Nothing but SP on that.

Dave: What else have I got here . . .

Dose: I see topless dancing over there. Oh, I'm sorry.

Keyboards? What, Do You Hate Hip Hop or Something?

PAGE 32



Heroin is fucking amazing.

It's just like- I don't even want to understand anymore.

Something horrific.

Something-

monstrous.

Stance

A point, barely perceptible, pricking the bottom of the tender bowl beneath my Adam's apple. I did not open my eyes, and I did not feel hot breath on my face. It did not speak to me.

WE DO NOT SEE. WE DO NOT SEE ANYTHING. WE DO NOT HEAR. WE DO NOT HEAR EVERYTHING. WE DO NOT HEAR THE ARGUMENTS, THE DISCUSSIONS, THE DEBATES. WE DO NOT HEAR THE DESIRES, THE ENMITIES, THE AMAZEMENTS. WE ONLY HEAR THE BLOOD IN THE VEINS, THE MUSCLES THAT FLOW, THE MEAT THAT MOVES.

I was floating in the darkness of infinity, thinking that at any moment a slight event could place me past time, that maybe I should start getting used to it. Ha ha. No, there is no truth to this conceit. Fear was like a metronome as I waited. There was no rhythm to it.

For us the mind had become a site less of science than of art. Or maybe our art was science. But you would not have recognized it. The walls were dark brown, uneven, rough, and the place was dimly lit, suggesting monolithic stone construction. But of course there were desks, offices, computers. We were not a separate culture. Some of those of lower importance left at night, came back in the morning. There was the glass of the enclosure, non-reflective, one-way, bulletproof stuff that had been ordered from a company in a city, which existed in a state in the same country we had at one point thought of ourselves as being located in.

They did not have ears. Their heads were like hams, lumpy and irregular, but with a blunt snout in which you could see teeth. Definitely teeth. A certain sleekness, despite the irregularity, nothing seeming ill-formed or accidental or broken.

There was one eye, on the left side of their faces, each of them looking as if they had been injured in an identical manner. The eye was large, but difficult to see from the side or even at a slight angle to the Reyes' faces. Only when one gazed directly into your eyes did you see the blank whiteness. Not a blank whiteness, something fierce and painful, as if intense light poured from it, shocking at the moment of direct focus, and completely absent when the thing

Shemadlee

Dose: I dunno, Riddlore.

Jel: Riddlore, over at his house, doing songs together.

Dose: It's very relative.

Dave: Which, that song apparently got erased?

Dose: Yeah yeah yeah.

Jel: Somebody fucked up. One of the Restiform Bodies kids.

Dose: Whoops!

[Way to fucking go, George.]

In Which Our Interviewer Displays Ignorance of Technical Arcana:

Dave: To switch to more down-to-earth stuff, what about you guys' recording process, is it like, you give him a beat, or you work together on the music, it's back and forth?

Jel: Usually, he'll give me an idea, he'll be like, I want it to be like this. This is what I'm writing about, He'll read me the poem, and sometimes he'll have a sample in mind, and I'll work off it, or he'll start a beat, and we'll work on it together. It's very fluid.

Dose: It gets more open, too. You get bored being Guru and DJ Premier, so we just do our music and things happen. And I think on the new record, the points where it piques the interest of certain crowds and loses the interest of others are the points where we've broke from Being Guru and Premier, and started getting more integrated and a little more imaginative with the sounds we can go for one this song to this song, because the record is contrast-heavy, for how short it is. You know, it's black-white-black-white.

Dave: That's one of the best things about it, too.

Dose: Textural.

Dave: Jel, you did a record called "Ten Seconds", and, I'm sorry, I forget the name of the sampler...

Jel: 1200.

Dose: That's the way of the world. I was gonna make a point about, we were talking about Anticon, and the maturity of the energy behind our music is never in beef. But the criticism, it's typically impossible, when things like the 'Them record is recorded in 1997 and released one month before the Circle record, which was recorded in '99, you'll never get an equality between the minds that are digesting what you've spit out a while ago. And it's all Tribe Called Quest records, it's an age-old thing, whatever it is, but there's never gonna be an even keel between critic and music-maker and what inspires either party. So it's relative, but it's also some hip hop stuff. When I meet musicians, whether it's Hrvatski or someone else, they always cock their head and go, "Man, it's funny you're in hip hop, people wanna punch you for doing your music!" It's a very relative thing that we have to deal with because we know where we came from. So it flares up, it's hemorrhoids, it flares up and we put some ointment on it, and it goes away.

Dave: But it's not something you guys are interested at all in being involved in, responding to.

Dose: You know, after twenty-something, it's pretty hard to be interested in fighting.

Jel: It's pretty fucking . . .

Dose: Annoying.

Dave: Well, not necessarily real fighting, but there is a certain tradition there.

Dose: That's the thing. It's a fine line, but it never really escalates to that level. It's like Tupac and Biggie.

Dave: I'm thinking more in terms of battling onstage . . .

Dose: That doesn't happen either. It escalates, things either break out in physical form, or they come out in this isolated bedroom potshot arena. And honestly I don't give a fuck. Obviously we spend a lot of time doing our music, and I think that's what separates thing in the long run is that we spend a lot of time doing music, and there's a lot of people spend a lot of time in the politics of music, and that becomes their music, and we try not to.

Jel: And with that Blowed song, the week it was released, Sole had Ellay Kule, Busdriver, and who else?

was not looking at you. The light illuminated nothing in the enclosure when the things walked around. It only blazed into your awareness when one of them glared at you – glared at you despite the one-way glass. Nearly blinding. We put a layer of tint on the enclosure windows, but this did nothing to lower the light's intensity. It was as if it wasn't there.

The creation process was chemical. Alchemical. A reversal, turning gold into lead – a million unseen, barely directed reactions with unquantifiable outcomes and by-products, taking place where measuring them would have been tricky even if we had been given the language to place values on them. The misunderstanding persists that such things are somehow mysteries, in the antiquated sense of poltergeists, disappearing freightliners, objects in the sky, weeping Virgins of Guadalupe, or the throwing aside of crutches. But there are levels of ignorance, and there are sometimes ways to control and benefit even from that which we cannot view with the dead certitude of arithmetic.

There were formulae, though, processes for synthesizing the necessary catalysts, each taking decades to conceive and execute. And there were cold, dead machines, EKG monitors and CAT scanners and, in the center of a circular room, freight scales and men with stun guns and explosives and the skill and willingness to use them.

My hair, of course, is white. The only surprising thing about this is that it has been white from nearly the beginning of the process, long before we learned of our folly. Something about the catalysts. About half of us were like this within a month. Some fooled around with dyes, but it didn't last long. Vanity wasn't worth the precious time.

I don't think they had tails. I think they had four legs. I know that their surfaces – I won't say skins – were mottled shiny black and rust-red in small, irregular patterns, like the fur of a tabby. Here, kitty kitty. But there was no fur, just color and surface. For all that, they were fully physical. They were weighed and measured. They could be tranquilized. There were plans to conduct more thorough physical examinations.

End

Explanation

Start

"Do you ever think that maybe what's going on here . . . isn't quite right?"

"What? We're not hurting anyone. We're the only humans they're experimenting on, and we're all free to go."

"Free to go. I didn't mean that. Maybe noone's getting hurt. Not that I know of. But I feel like maybe we're out of our depth - they're out of their depth. It sounds alarmist, I know - 'forces outside of our control'. Chicken Little shit. But."

"Not alarmist. Fucking retrograde, simpléminded, fogey resistance to change. This is, what we're doing here, this is the next stage of human evolution. We're cracking the wetware, and we're making it better. There are plenty of people who are going to be ready to say the exact same things you're saying as soon as it all goes public, but they're not going to like you any more than they do me, no matter what you say. So you better decide whose side you're on."

"But - wait, hear me out! - But how deep have they taken you, into the wetware, I mean? There've been things to make me think that the stuff is dangerous, maybe even uncontrollable."

"That's why we're starting small. We'll work up to better control, better containment, tighter precautions, as we get more ambitious. The risks go up, the safeguards get better - it all stays balanced. Where's the problem? Besides, this is the greatest adventure of a lifetime, and you're stuck up on safety? That's not even your job."

"You didn't answer my question. How deep have they taken you? Haven't you seen enough by now to be scared? Or maybe you're being saved for something else."

"Nothing scares me."

Shemuelbea

ing to Dose One or Aesop Rock, but to us it's very relative. They don't really want it, They just think they want it.

D: But the cLOUDDEAD project is gonna be on Ninja Tune.

Dose: But that's not a major label. That's still human beings, you know what I mean? But that's a good thing. Like, Subtle, we just signed a contract with Lex, which is Warp Records' hip hop subsidiary, to do the Subtle records. So, you know, we're finding engines that are run by human beings to work with, but as far as major labels go, I don't think we're headed that direction. We're a little more organic than that.

Dave: But the Ninja Tune or Warp thing, you get to a point where you have a lot more business opportunities, even if you're not on a major label. I mean, they have more infrastructure, things like that.

Jel: You also have much more freedom, not having to bow down to whatever corporation.

Dose: Lex, Warp and Ninja are mediums. They're Triple A ball clubs, you know? So we're not selling our soul to the devil, but we are working.

Beef Wellington b/w Blowing Chunks:

Dave: Before we started the tape, we were talking about, I guess you could call it interpersonal rap relations. And one thing that's come up recently - I didn't know about the Blueprint thing - but some stuff with Project Blowed.

Jel: That's old. It's recent, because there's a four year old verse on the new Busdriver record. I was confronted by 2Mex about it before the song was even released, he was apologizing. Daddy Kev wanted to take it off. They all liked the song, and there was just those certain lines that some people didn't want to put out because of that. And it's all understood between the two camps. It's just internet kids and a lot of fans who don't know about that personal shit, so of course they're gonna be like "Oh my God! This song's out, there's more beef!"

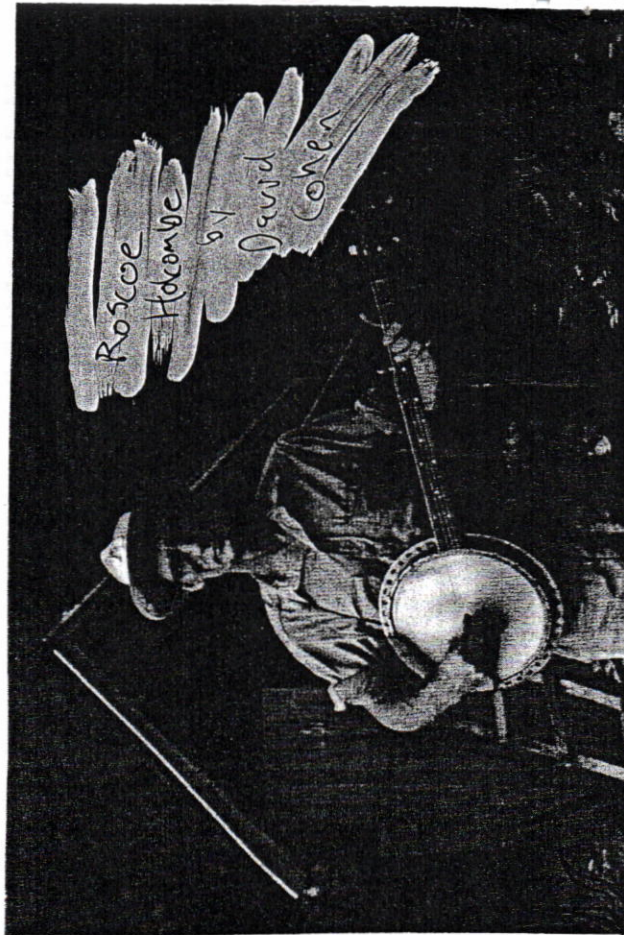
Themselves

be close friends, living together, family members, and musical collaborators. It definitely results in, it results in a need for communication, and when we don't talk, things swell, like any organism.

D: There was some pretty interesting news. Buck 65 has apparently been signed by Warner Brothers.

Dose: Yeah, Canada, Warner Canada.

D: Has there been anything like that coming your way, have you dealt with any label interest?



Jel: There's always been little things, like this guy we know at Grand Royal, which is through Universal, he's always trying to pitch us . . .

Dose: Mush has had opportunities, people have contacted Mush about talk-

Setting the Scene

End

Start

"This newsletter has learned that certain government-funded academics are on the verge of announcing a major breakthrough in the field of neuroinstantiation. What's that, you ask? It's the "hottest" new field in certain dark corners of the state-funded ivory castle hiding behind our university system. It is a threat to the happiness and well-being of every family and individual in our great nation – and readers of this newsletter will know that I am neither given easily to hyperbole nor very often wrong when I indulge in it. Neuroinstantiation, or as the insiders refer to it, "N.I.", is a process by which individuals with certain unique brain functions (whose kind, I should remind you, have appeared in the harsh revealing light of these pages before) are mechanically, chemically, and electrically aided in the creation of physical matter out of thin air. That's right, loyal readers – these people (whose other abilities I have made sure to keep you informed about) have now become able to create something out of nothing, in clear violation of the ironclad Second Law of Thermodynamics. Now, I'm not a physicist (though I've been pleased to discover that some of my most loyal readers in fact *are*), but even my dark-ages secondary education left me with a persistent knowledge of this simple and unbendable (not even bendable!) principle – that, just as there is no free lunch, there is no such thing as something out of nothing. Everything, to state it simply, must come from somewhere. And somehow a way has been discovered to use the unnatural and frightening attributes of a certain group of (I shall be generous) *people* to circumvent – no, defy – no, *heedlessly violate* this rule upon which the stability of our very plane of existence rests. We all witnessed the consequences of defying another such basic law during recent attempts by similarly misguided tinkers and eggheads, who felt they could divine methods of transportation vastly superior to our current capabilities. Apparently these speed demons were unsatisfied with the 700kph achieved by their commuter maglevs – they had to go faster, whatever the tragic cost. I extend my fullest condolences to the loved ones of their victims, and contend that we could be looking at similar consequences if this new wave of madness is not stopped.

And it is not only the esoteric terror of inter-dimensional cataclysm that

Character Development

I find so distressing. The most recent information from my source inside the operation, in fact, changes the nature of the potential threat dramatically.

For these individuals (funded in part by taxpayer dollars, no less) have not been using their new tricks to pull mere rocks, toasters, or paper flowers from under their hats. No, the most recent "Achievement" has been the instantiation of an actual *creature* – though this, if you'll pardon my colloquialism, ain't no bunny rabbit.

Actually, it's much less. I'll let the rest of my source's statement speak for itself—

'They may have finally gone over the edge. The mentally empowered subjects were first subjected to several months of regression therapy (in which patients are slowly taught to recapture memories of their very early life). The therapy was intense, they actually found it traumatic, and it culminated in one final group session, during which all subjects were taken back to the moments just after their own conceptions, told to live as their own zygotic form, to remember the extension and contours of their bodies, track their old, absolutely minimal cross-membrane signal transfers into their current, infinitely more complex cerebrums, and simply *float* in that room. The room had been warmed, humidified, and lined with soft material for their comfort. And then (and they all, on some level, knew this was coming, even if they had fully occupied the zygotic no-mind state), the scientists in the observation and control booths turned on their machines.

'The process was maybe no more terrifying than what they had been part of before, even if it made them feel a little more naked than ever. But when they eventually revealed the product to all involved, it just took things to a whole new level. You see, the gifted are never told in advance what direction those labcoated sadists are trying to lead them. They only give them the inputs they think the gifted need – they want to eliminate any possible internal bias. But anyway, they took the gifted

Themselvee

cord, and there's nothing even remotely concerned with the second person on this new one.

[Interviewer's Note – I'm not sure what Dose is thinking right there, but "Good People Check" is, to be technical, almost entirely in the second person, and to be essential, is all about hip hop. I know I'm cheating by butting in after the fact, but something needed to be said.]

Dose: I think the point of that record, though, is that we were living together for two years, and that's what came out. It was difficult, we were squeezing a drop out of an apple, you know. So it's not, like Jeff [It's Hip Hop Coming Out Day! Jeff=Jel] was saying, we saw it in our heads, but it's not something that was forced, it's as natural as can be to progress.

Big Up to Daniel Webster.

D: How are things going with Anticon, as people get more and more recognition, more success? Are things getting more stressful, less stressful?

Jel: It's always up and down. There'll times where everything's fucking perfect and it's like "Aw, this is it, we're making it."

Dose: Good news for three days straight.

Jel: And then there's spots where you're just like "I wish I could quit."

Dose: It's very difficult.

Jel: Because we're living off it, trying to live off it. And it's the only way we can do it, because if we all had day jobs we wouldn't be able to put as much time and effort into it. So it's something you sacrifice for, but we're getting used to it. And things are picking up, and there's more opportunities.

Dose: The passion has changed too, the passion has become permanent now that it's what we're all doing for a living. The, the, the angst or whatever we have behind this music has changed shape, has matured in a sense. It's hard to

Themselves

D: Wow.

Jel: We were just beginning, getting into making music at that point, doing it on our own. That's why the first Them record is so raw, it's just beats that I did, rhymes that he wrote.

Dose: It was an experiment, because we'd never worked together. The ground we treaded on was pretty . . . I like that word, treaded. Treaduh duh duh duh. And the new record is more natural, it is consciously done. We weren't really doing what we've always dreamed of, but we were doing what we wanted.

Jel: This album, we had the music in mind, how we wanted to hear music ourselves, our favorites.

D: Because the impression from listening to it, from the outside at least, is that the first album has much more traditional beats, it's straight beats and rhymes, and the new one is a lot more mixed up, a lot more like, for example, the cLOUDDEAD album. A lot more shifting, offbeat stuff.

Dose: Yeah.

D: Another interesting thing is that your vocals, your lyrics, on the first one are very abstract, for the most part. Where on this one, there's a lot more hip hop stuff that you're doing. Obviously you're playing with it, but do you think you're willing to go-

Dose: That's interesting, because actually there's more- oooh. I, I, I don't think this new record is abstract at all. I think the poems are pointed, and then there is some playing, i.e. "Good People Check". The first record actually has more hip hop essence in it, i.e. there's battle rhymes on the first re-

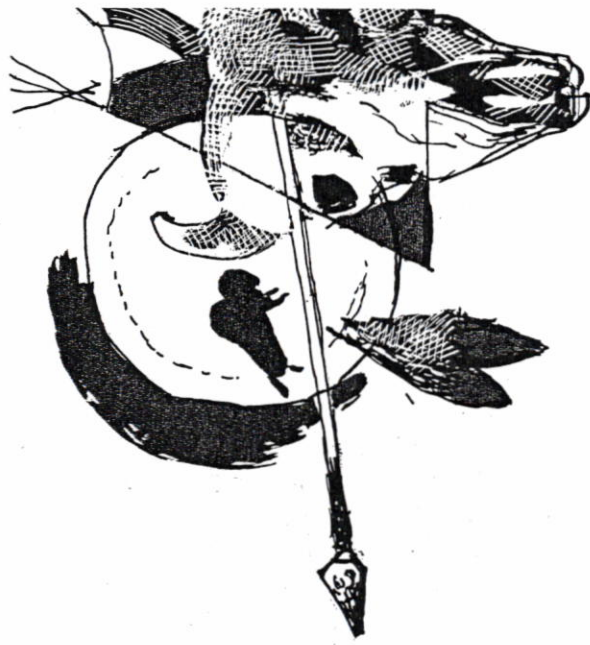
Lies, all Lies.

into the lab, and they had it there, under a microscope. It was alive. Not a zygote, though, from what I saw. Just one cell, looking like none I had seen before - afterwards I snuck out to the library and confirmed that it matched nothing on the books. But even with no baseline, it was crystal clear the thing was not healthy. It was lopsided, which no hard-bodied living thing can ever truly be and survive. And sure enough (and for my part let me say Thank God), the thing was dead within a few hours. But they preserved the body very carefully, from what I hear. And I know for a fact that some members of the team actually felt saddened by its death.'

There you have it, folks. Alien, previously unseen life created through modern black magic. But, you may say, what harm can one cell do? And I reply, it can become many."

End

[This is fiction, so of course it's been rejected from, basically, everywhere.]



FUCKING HIPPIES, I'LL CRUSH ANY- ONE.

Interview with Themselves

"Fucking Hippies I'll Crush Anyone" - This is the most accurate, or maybe just the most interesting, way I can interpret the first words on my tape of this interview. I turned on the tape before I sat down with Jel and Dose One, who are respectively the producer (mostly) and vocalist (mainly) in a group called Themselves. Themselves have an album called "The No Music" out now on Anticon records. It's an obscure, indirect record, tough to penetrate. The runup to this interview was obscured by my fumbling, as well as a particularly loud truck passing under the fire escape, and that first phrase doesn't make much sense - we sure weren't talking about hippies. But then again, those friendly furry fuckups have become targets of scorn from pretty much every subculture that thinks it's not "cool" to wear earth shoes and smell bad, so I guess it's about time for hip hop to get in on the act. All hail Themselves. They hate hippies, so you can to.

Preamble:

Dose: . . . fucking hippies I'll crush anyone.

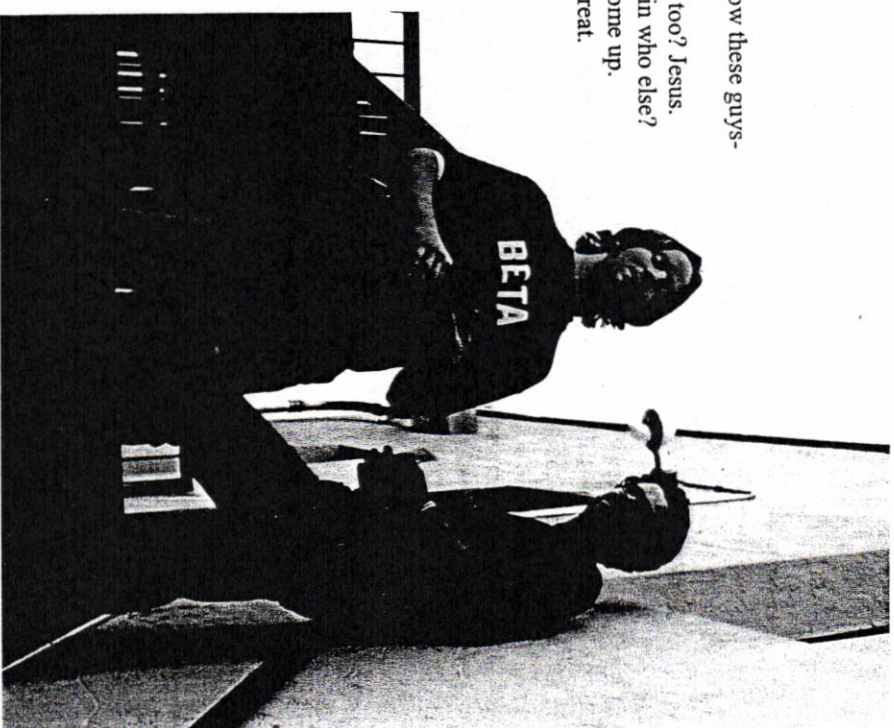
Jel: . . . was telling me that they were talking shit here, too.

Dose: Oh, really.

Jel: They probably make comments at every show.

Dave: Who's this?

Dose: . . . about how these guys-
Jel: Blueprint
Dave: . . . Oh, him too? Jesus.
Dose: Him too as in who else?
Dave: Well, it'll come up.
Dose: Oh, okay, great.



Scopes Monkey Time Trials:

D: My notes are a mess, but to start off, one of the things that interested me was the change between the first record and the second record. The music changed one way, the vocals changed another way. Was it a conscious change, or do you just feel like you've gotten to where you can do what you want?

Jel: It was more of an evolutionary change. It was such a long time since the first record.

D: When did that come out?

Jel: It came out in 2000, but it was recorded in 1997.